

Urban Renewal through Social Capital Building: The ‘New’ Urban Renewal Strategy?



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Abstract

Many neoliberal urban planners claim that spurring gentrification in a city is the only way to enact urban renewal. This is problematic, however, because gentrification poses an active threat to democracy in cities. This paper investigates the possibility of renewing cities in an alternative, less damaging way: through building social capital. It uses two examples from Berlin, Germany, of interventions that have spurred social capital—and, in turn, revived urban neighborhoods—to reveal realistic models for opposing state-sanctioned neoliberal gentrification. The concluding argument is that there are other, more democratic ways to make our cities better places, which urban planners must investigate with urgency.

Keywords

Gentrification; Social Capital; Urban Planning; Urban Renewal; Democracy; Voter Turnout; Neoliberalism; Urban Renewal Through Social Capital Building (URSCB); Quartiersmanagement (QM); Socially Integrative City; Spreefeld

Introduction

It is predicted that by the year 2050, seventy percent of the world's population will be residing in cities. This means that urban planning decisions made in the next few decades will affect more than two thirds of human lives on earth (United Nations).

Proponents of gentrification claim that spurring gentrification in a city is the only effective way to enact urban renewal. I argue that this contemporary neoliberal planning strategy is unsustainable not only because it is largely responsible for a global urban housing affordability crisis, but because it unfairly targets minority groups, lowering overall voter turnout and thus posing an existential threat to the democratic process in cities.

There is a need for alternative solutions to the problem of urban decay—solutions that do not involve state-sanctioned gentrification. One solution I propose is *Urban Renewal through Social Capital Building* (URSCB). Two examples I investigate from Berlin, Germany, of interventions that have built social capital—and, in turn, revived urban neighborhoods—suggest that this method can match engineered gentrification in its ability to make cities more livable places without infringing upon democracy.

Gentrification as Urban Renewal

In order to understand this argument, it is important to first understand how gentrification has evolved into a type of state-sanctioned urban renewal strategy. Ruth Glass, a British Marxist urban sociologist and longtime resident of the London borough of Islington, was the first to coin the term 'gentrification' as part of the introduction to her 1964 book *London: Aspects of Change*. In her book, Glass described gentrification as a phenomenon driven primarily by a "middle-class gentry" who chose to purchase houses in low-income areas and renovate them, driving property

market values up and rendering an area financially unlivable for its original residents. She describes her experience witnessing and understanding gentrification in 1960s Islington in the following excerpt, taken from her book:

One by one, many of the working-class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle classes—upper and lower. Shabby, modest mews and cottages—two rooms up and two down—have been taken over, when their leases have expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences. Larger Victorian houses, downgraded in an earlier or recent period—which were used as lodging houses or were otherwise in multiple occupation—have been upgraded once again ... Once this process of “gentrification” starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed. (Glass 18)

It is important to consider the catalysts for gentrification at this time and place in history, according to Glass: in her eyes, gentrification was spurred solely by individual, bourgeois Londoners looking for a change of scenery. They would purchase homes and make structural improvements, driving up the market value of the surrounding houses and making the area more palatable for wealthier people. This ended up displacing poorer people and altering a neighborhood’s fabric. Gentrification was, to Glass, “a quaint urban sport of the professional hipper classes unafraid to rub shoulders with the unwashed masses” (Smith 439).

Though the fact that there are winners and losers in every gentrification process has not changed, the meaning of gentrifying a neighborhood has shifted dramatically in the decades since Glass’ original definition was published. What has happened, specifically, is that the *culprits* behind gentrification have changed—while some decades ago gentrification was a sporadic phenomenon spurred by *individuals* (for instance, these London bourgeois), the process of

gentrification has since fallen out of the hands of the gentry and into the hands of governments, corporations, and government-corporation partnerships. This has escalated to the point where urbanist and geographer Neil Smith redefines gentrification, far from Glass' original definition, as an "ambitiously and unscrupulously planned" "new global urban strategy." Gentrification is, to Smith, literally a method of "cost-effective" urban renewal purposefully implemented by city governments around the world to revive neighborhoods (Ibid.).

Smith unpacks this idea of gentrification as urban renewal strategy at length in his paper "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy," explaining some of the motivations and methods behind gentrification's implementation in cities around the globe since roughly the mid-1980s. One document he cites heavily in his paper is the *London 1999 Decree for Urban Renaissance*. This article—which Smith is careful to note was published just thirty-five years after Ruth Glass' initial work on gentrification—outlined the British state's goal to literally *use* gentrification as a *tool* to catalyze an "urban renaissance" in depressed towns and cities across the United Kingdom. The way the state planned to do this was through the further "intensified privatization of inner-city land and units," which would provide "the platform on which large-scale multi-faceted urban regeneration, far outstripping 1960s urban renewal," could materialize (Smith 438). The British urban legislature, in other words, understood that through the privatization of mass sections of property in a number of British cities and towns, they could incentivize investors to purchase and improve dilapidated sites and flip them for more money—leaving the previously "ruined" areas "revived" (Ibid.). The British state, in turn, would not need to dispense a single pound for the physical construction of these new and improved structures—they would only benefit from the property tax revenue generated. Since its initial appearance in

the 1980s-90s in England and other western nations, this state-sanctioned gentrification has become the dominant renewal strategy of the 21st century neoliberal city.

The Problem

While it may accomplish goals like making sidewalks cleaner and crime rates go down on paper, gentrification can be a very destructive form of urban renewal to many residents of cities, particularly residents of color. Not only does it displace specifically low-income people, who are usually unwilling to move and alter neighborhood character to extremes, it also actively discourages targeted minority groups from voting.

One study that demonstrates some of gentrification's adverse effects is titled "The Impact of Gentrification on Voter Turnout" (Knotts et al.). The article, which unpacks gentrification's impact on voter turnout percentages in Atlanta, Georgia neighborhoods in 2006, proposes the "destabilization thesis"—which claims that the "lack of community connections" in what the article calls "gentrifying contexts" actually drives voter turnout down across demographics (Knotts et al. 110). The article relies on data from the Census Bureau's City of Atlanta voter file to measure turnout and geographic information systems (GIS) software to measure levels of gentrification. The results of the study were as follows:

The findings, which include adjustments for factors such as race, college attendance, age, etc. to ensure that gentrification is the isolated cause of the drop in participation, suggest one thing: that more gentrification leads to less voting overall. The author’s interpretation of the table reads: “holding all other variables at their means or modes, [the probability of longstanding resident voting] drops from 0.559 in the least gentrified neighborhood to 0.383 in the most gentrified neighborhood” (Knotts et al.119). This represents an overall drop of nearly thirty percent in voter

TABLE 1
The Impact of Gentrification on Voter Turnout

| | Coefficient | Standard Error | Z | p Value | Δ Probability* |
|---|-------------|----------------|--------|---------|----------------|
| College | 0.006 | 0.005 | 1.11 | 0.267 | |
| Homeownership | 0.008 | 0.002 | 4.46 | 0.000 | 0.187 |
| Organization | 0.084 | 0.038 | 2.22 | 0.026 | 0.108 |
| Gentrification | -0.003 | 0.063 | -0.05 | 0.961 | |
| Black | -0.078 | 0.126 | -0.62 | 0.533 | |
| Female | 0.148 | 0.025 | 5.97 | 0.000 | 0.037 |
| Age | 0.020 | 0.001 | 19.22 | 0.000 | 0.366 |
| Longstanding voters | 1.063 | 0.032 | 33.75 | 0.000 | 0.246 |
| Longstanding voters × Gentrification | -0.160 | 0.028 | -5.65 | 0.000 | -0.177 |
| Constant | -2.535 | 0.175 | -14.47 | 0.000 | |
| Number of Level 1 units = 78,991 | | | | | |
| Number of Level 2 units = 81 | | | | | |
| Percent reduction in error = 18.5 | | | | | |

*Change in probability moving from the minimum to maximum values of the independent variable, holding all other variables at their respective means or modes.
SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau (1990, 2000); City of Atlanta voter file.

turnout when gentrification is a factor. The fact that the strategic application of urban renewal as city planning strategy leads to this plummet in turnout suggests that gentrification can surely not be the most democratic solution to urban decay, assuming political equality is the most important tenet of democracy, as Dahl does in his renowned life’s work *On Democracy* (Dahl et al.).

A 2016 article from the *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Politics* by Newman, Pearson-Merkowitz and Velez brings the dimension of race further into the conversation and analysis. The article introduces the “gentrification threat hypothesis,” which the authors explain as revolving around the idea that “for black Americans, residing in a predominantly black context experiencing

white growth (i.e., a gentrifying context) should evoke the threats of residential and political displacement and erode trust in one's neighbors" (Newman et al. 322). White in-migration brought about by gentrification, they theorize, breaks down social capital by chipping away at black residents' trust in their neighborhoods, camaraderie and "expectations of reciprocity" (Ibid.). The authors are claiming that the invasion of the richer, whiter, less-marginalized "other" dilutes majority black neighborhoods, undermining the sense of belonging blacks may feel in their communities and leading them to disengage and relinquish perceived (or literal) ownership (Ibid.).¹ This translates directly to a downtick in voter participation (Ibid.). This may indicate that gentrification could be a contributor to the historically low voter turnout amongst specifically black Americans—between 1990 and 2016, blacks turned out only five-sixths of the percentage that whites did, on average (Krogstad et al.).

It is evident that the time has come for responsible city-residents to pose the following question to their city and federal governments: what are the other options for urban renewal? How can governments 'regenerate' neighborhoods and entire cities in more inclusive ways—ways that improve cities for *all* the people who already live there, rather than just for developers or tax revenue, and enable the democratic process rather than obstruct it?

As aforementioned, I focus on one particular alternative urban renewal strategy to gentrification in this paper, which I call *Urban Renewal through Social Capital Building*

¹ Newman et al. tested their claims through analysis of the 2000 Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey (SCBS), which measured "thoughts and feelings" regarding social capital across a large overall sample of people (29,233), which included a relatively high proportion of blacks (3,663) (Newman et al., 324). The independent variable measured in the study was white in-migration (data was also drawn from Decennial Censuses). The question that was posed to the focus group was: "Thinking about the people in your neighborhood, would you say you can trust them a lot, some, only a little, or not at all?" Respondents gauged sentiments on a scale from 1-4, 1 being the least trust and 4 being the most (Newman et al., 325). The research concluded that in predominantly black neighborhoods, "white growth is associated with a significant reduction in neighborhood social trust." This held particularly true in neighborhoods that began as "dominantly black" (more than 95%), where maximum level of white in-migration measured resulted in an average 36% decrease in neighborhood trust (Newman et al., 330).

(URSCB). URSCB, quite opposite to urban renewal through state-sanctioned gentrification, is a method of urban renewal that city governments could implement that would increase people's ability to appropriate urban space and participate in urban decision making, rather than restrict it. Though only one of many potential alternative urban renewal methods to gentrification, URSCB is a particularly relevant alternative because, beyond simply revitalizing neighborhoods for the people who live in them, it actually helps build social capital in them. While the application of gentrification as an urban renewal strategy has actually diminished social capital in communities, URSCB would repair some of the damage already done by gentrification as well as actually accomplish urban renewal the way gentrification may once have aimed to. It is the alternative that marginalized urban dwellers need now more than ever.

I unpack URSCB in two parts. First, I paint a picture of what URSCB looks like, through defining social capital itself, and by looking at why building it can help communities become better and more democratic. Next, I examine two examples of how to implement URSCB from Berlin, Germany: one being through tactful community structuring (*Quartiersmanagement* Program), and the other being promotion of social capital building through smart housing-project structure (*Spreefeld*). Through highlighting the success of these initiatives in helping to create better, more inclusive, more equitable and entirely more democratic neighborhoods, my goal is to show the power that building social capital can have to make cities better for the people who actually live there, rather than earn money for developers or city tax revenues.

By this article's end, it should be easier to imagine the term 'urban renewal' evolving into a phenomenon with positive rather than negative connotations.

What is Social Capital, and How Can it Spur Urban Renewal?

Before proposing to invest in building social capital to renew neighborhoods, it is important first to understand exactly what social capital is, and the role that high levels of social capital can play in constructing and maintaining sustainable, equitable communities and cities.

French theorist Pierre Bourdieu was one of the first to offer a definition for the term “social capital” in the early 1990s. He understood levels of social capital as directly relating to the quantity and intensity of connections within a community, defining it as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu 249). Thomas Sander, a later theorist who expanded on much of the earlier writings on social capital, simplified this definition, interpreting social capital more broadly as “the collective value of all 'social networks' and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other” (Sander 13). Other theorists’ definitions have ranged in their scope and breadth (Putnam 1995, Ostrom, Coleman), but the general consensus across social capital theory is that high levels of social capital in a community mean high levels of trust, connection, engagement, and reciprocity in said community. To ‘build’ social capital in a neighborhood, therefore, is to build connections and trust between residents.

Social capital’s inherent utility is important to consider when discussing it in the context of urban renewal. While social capital is understood to be a positive thing in and of itself because people enjoy connecting with one another, it is also seen as a functional means to another end: “Like other forms of capital,” Coleman (another theorist) claims, “social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (Coleman 98). By this Coleman means that high levels of social capital in a community can translate to other, better economic and/or governmental outcomes in that community.

In his 2000 book *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam expands on this idea that high levels of social capital in a community or even an entire city or region can translate to positive development outcomes. He bases this hypothesis on the plausible basis that social capital “fosters generalized reciprocity,” that it is “self-reinforcing and cumulative” (Putnam 177). To destroy social networks (and by extension social capital), he says, is to break down these connections and channels of reciprocity that enhance productivity in any society (Ibid.).

A regional-level example that he uses to illustrate this point concerns the differing “nature and intensity of the interactions of civil society” in Northern and Southern Italy. Putnam attributes the differences in societal functionality and economic productivity between the north and the south to “the presence [or lack thereof] of strong networks of civic engagement” (Hibbitt 144). He argues that the notable breakdown of trust in the south has derailed the region’s economic development trajectory. In the same vein, he attributes the success of the north to the comparably better condition of the channels of trust and communication in the region (which exist for historical and economic reasons less relevant to the central arguments of this paper). His main point is that social capital, which is not numerically valued in a society or government (particularly under neoliberalism, where only things with potential monetary exchange value are valued), is a key ingredient to ensuring success and productivity—and it is the key thing that Southern Italy, as a result of its history, lacks.

So, what do Putnam's arguments have to do with urban renewal? Just the way that enhanced social capital, in the form of advanced social connectedness and high trust levels, functions to maintain productive societies at the regional level, it also works at the community and neighborhood level. In fact, Putnam attributes the “breakdown” of cities in the United States to an overall decline in social capital; he rationalizes that the particular negligence of pre-existing social

networks that post-war urban renewal projects in the US were largely responsible for led to the mid-80's phenomenon of nationwide urban decay. He claims that projects, such as those that came out of the 1949 Housing Act, which were often devised on huge, homogenous scales without taking into account neighborhood/community intricacies and nuances, "heedlessly ravaged existing social networks" (Hibbitt et al. 144).

Assuming Putnam's perspective that the breakdown of social capital that occurred in post-war America, in Southern Italy, or anywhere else is at least partially to blame for rising crime and general urban decay, it is reasonable to expect that the reinstatement and re-fostering of social capital can reverse urban decay. This contradicts the neoliberal argument that gentrification, which has no regard for the maintenance of social networks, is the only solution to urban decay, and supports the claim that URSCB is a viable alternative to gentrification as urban renewal strategy.

URSCB: Implementation Methods

Now that I have determined what social capital is and that building it in a community can serve as an alternative urban renewal method to gentrification by spurring positive, inclusive development, a new question arises: how can social capital actually be built in neighborhoods? What measures, in other words, can be taken to foster and maintain the levels of social capital needed to make a city a safe and productive place?

In the following section, I explore two different interventions that both city governmental bodies and private collectives in Berlin, Germany have used to foster social capital on small scales. One will be on the neighborhood scale (*Quartiersmanagement*), and the other on the single housing project scale (*Spreefeld*). Since these initiatives demonstrably enhance community connectedness, build trust, and strengthen channels of communication in the spaces in which they function, I will

refer to them as social capital building ‘tools.’ They are ideal examples of alternatives to gentrification for urban renewal in the context I discuss, as they strengthen social capital and make the communities around them stronger, safer, and overall better.

My central argument is that if a city commits to fostering social capital using methods like those I discuss, gentrification is not necessary for city regeneration. Assuming my arguments about the efficacy of these models are correct, city governments need not do away with public housing projects and rent control in inner city areas in the name of creating ‘safe’ or ‘clean’ cities. With the application of urban renewal through methods like these, the pursuit of democracy and the protection of equal rights for all people need not be forgone; instead, cities can become safer, cleaner, better spaces, but also more inclusive, and by extension, equitable spaces. They can become better cities not for the few, but for the many.

Model 1: *Quartiersmanagement* and the Socially Integrative City

As Neil Smith reminds us in “New Globalism, New Urbanism,” gentrification as urban renewal strategy is an utterly global phenomenon (Smith). Cities of every shape and size have undergone some variation of state-sanctioned gentrification under capitalism, and the effects have been felt by marginalized communities globally. Though this is true, some governments and city governments have been better than others about recognizing and addressing the polarizing effects of gentrification and neoliberalism in general more recently. One city that has done relatively well in this regard is Berlin, Germany.

It is important to address that Berlin is somewhat of an anomaly compared to other major metropolitan hubs in Western Europe. This is largely due to its complex recent history. Unlike London or Paris, Berlin was never a major industrial machine during the 20th century. The

combined effects of World War II and East-West division along Cold War lines made it a place that was neither fully safe nor accessible, let alone highly economically productive, for any extended period in the latter half of the 20th century. While the Berlin Wall stood from 1961-1989, West Berlin became such an undesirable place to live that the West German government established financial incentives to mobilize people to move there. Before long, West Berlin had grown into a concentrated, eclectic society of artists, anarchists and other counter-culture types looking to lead a life outside of the conventional capitalist societal structure. As more people with similar inclinations and lifestyles began to dominate the city, Berlin became a hotbed for activism, and an active squatter movement and vibrant underground music scene blossomed.

Though the Wall between East and West has since fallen, this counterculture streak is deeply ingrained in Berlin's culture, and many residents who actively remember a West Berlin that was essentially governed by artists and squatters are deeply concerned about preserving the individual's right to the city, or people of all backgrounds' rights to continue to actively appropriate the space in which they live. This widespread concern explains why the people, and even, at times, the city government of Berlin itself have prioritized exploring alternatives to gentrification for urban renewal.

The alternatives I discuss represent a sample of a wide array of similar initiatives in the city of Berlin. Understanding them will help give a better sense of the uniquely inclusive nature of Berlin's urban development landscape today, as well as show that experimental urban renewal tactics can truly function outside the framework of neoliberalism.

The Socially Integrative City

Though, as aforementioned, neither Germany nor Berlin were exceptions to the global plight of gentrification as urban renewal strategy, Germany as a whole did make an effort to formally address the worsening problem of social polarization that was occurring as a result of gentrification and neoliberalism starting in 1999, when it introduced a multi-faceted federal (Länder) “pilot-project” called “Districts With Special Development Needs - The Socially Integrative City” (short: “Socially Integrative City”). At the time of inception, the goal of the program was to help revitalize decaying inner-city neighborhoods (specifically migrant-dense neighborhoods) where unemployment and minor petty crimes were prevalent (these are what is meant by ‘districts with special development needs’). The Socially Integrative City intended to achieve its goals through empowering residents, in whatever way, to get involved in decision-making processes at the community level (Löhr 1-4).

Dr. Rolf-Peter Löhr of the German Institute for Urban Affairs explains the rationale behind the Socially Integrative City—which was an out-of-the-box urban renewal approach at the time—in a paper prepared for the 2003 *European Urban Development, Research and Policy* conference:

...Urban development is more than buildings and streets and squares. It concerns the people who live there and their specific situation. Saint Augustine recognized that in 400 A.D. He knew that people and their dreams make cities rather than bricks and mortar. These people are the main focus of Socially Integrated City. The programme calls for change in the attitudes of municipal and federal executives, in legislative and business behaviour and, last but not least, in the way citizens think and act. (Löhr 2)

As demonstrated, Löhr understood that conventional urban development tactics like rapid, state-engineered gentrification neglected the “dreams” of individual city dwellers. He rationalized

that this might ignite or inflame feelings of disenfranchisement with the system for some people, which might encourage them to turn to do something like turn to crime.

The Socially Integrative City's goal was, thus, to “[redefine] the relationship between government and society” (Löhr 3). It aimed to empower residents, who may have felt alienated and powerless in the face of a system that was not concerned with them, by re-allocating them the tools needed to improve their own communities and lives. Löhr's rationale, and the rationale behind the whole program, was that this empowerment of community members, if successful, would give them a sense of ownership, control, and accountability in their own communities, leading them to transfer time and energy from something like crime to getting involved in actively improving their communities. The idea is that once invested in their communities, people would forge bonds with bodies like law enforcement and other governmental entities, working with them to make decisions about the city that represent the wants and needs of the community.

Quartiersmanagement

The Socially Integrative City program has been integrated into German urban governance in several phases over the course of the last two decades. Perhaps the most successful project in inspiring tangible change has been the initiative *Quartiersmanagement (QM)* (Neighborhood Management). QM has been implemented in several German cities, and has a large presence in Berlin, operating currently in thirty-five different neighborhoods, or “Kieze.” The QM program embodies the goals of the Socially Integrative City program; it is intended to “integrate strategies and players in neighbourhood development, link up economic and social development projects, and strengthen the scope and capacity of residents to take action” (Sirkeci et al. 77). It is a socially

focused development solution to the problems associated with urban decay—such as minor crime, isolation, and lack of access to employment or education.²

The way QM works is rather simple: at-risk neighborhoods are identified, and on-site neighborhood management offices are created to “act as mediators” between municipality government and local stakeholders. Each neighborhood is then allocated a ‘neighborhood fund’ by the federal government, the amount of which is determined based on need. What makes QM unique is that what is done with this money is decided not by the federal government, the city government or even the municipality government, but by a locally elected neighborhood council made up of local residents and representatives from local businesses and associations. The funds allocated to neighborhoods typically range between €300,000 and €500,000, and individual micromanaged projects can sometimes cost upwards of €10,000, meaning that residents are making direct decisions about how they want to utilize sums of money with purchasing power possibly far surpassing their own incomes. This inevitably lends massive amounts of agency and ownership to residents who might otherwise feel powerless to activate change (Kalandides et al.).

The use of the term ‘resident’ rather than ‘citizen’ to describe participants in the QM process is important—anyone residing in a Kiez, regardless of citizenship or immigration status, can be elected to the neighborhood council, and individual residents with no local association or business interests must make up fifty percent of the council. These rules exist to “integrate divergent voices” (Ibid.) and to promote representation of different residents’ interest groups, activities, initiatives, self-help groups, project sponsors, etc.

The composition of neighborhood councils shows that these measures for inclusion have indeed led to diverse representation—of the eleven residents that sit on the neighborhood

² \$15 million total of funding to date. (Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg)

management council of Richardplatz Süd in Neukölln, for example, six come from a migration background. Though 6/11 does not quite accurately reflect the aggregate percentage of persons with a migration background in the neighborhood of Richardplatz Süd, having more than half the residents of the council understand the unique challenges that come with being a migrant in Germany is an important step in the right direction. Numbers like these are relatively consistent across other neighborhoods where concentration of persons with migration backgrounds are high (Ibid.).

A document prepared by the office of Ingeborg Junge-Reyer, Berlin's (then) Senator for Urban Development, details projects initiated by the thirty-five different QM councils operating in Berlin. The highly targeted nature of the approaches taken by each council demonstrates the effectiveness of the Socially Integrative City's decision to allocate so much freedom to neighborhoods to decide how to use their funds; each neighborhood identifies its unique set of salient needs, and uses their funds to create projects that aid in meeting those needs specifically.

In one neighborhood, Brunnenviertel, for instance, youth unemployment exceeds twenty percent. Brunnenviertel, whose residents had a deep understanding of their problem from living through it, decided to use a chunk of their neighborhood fund to build an in-school career orientation project "Schule aktiv - Durchstarten im Brunnenviertel" (English translation: 'Active School - Get Started in Brunnenviertel') that includes a catering sector training program. Körnerpark, another Kiez, is made up of forty percent foreigners, and for residents not attending school or working in Germany, language barriers are a serious problem. To address this, Körnerpark used some of their neighborhood funds to organize a weekly "Parent Cafe" event. This event provides an opportunity for mothers specifically (who are often the most isolated members of an integrating family, due to their tendency to remain in the home) to have structured

conversations with other mothers, who might not share their first language but will certainly share the common experience of motherhood. Actual language classes are also offered in conjunction with the weekly event. Mehringplatz, yet another neighborhood, struggled with alcohol consumption and related litter in its main square, so it used its funds to create a community drinking and meeting place in a more secluded area equipped with benches and even a portable toilet (Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung). The success of several neighborhood initiatives in QM districts is indicated by a high turnover rate: several districts that were once allocated funds for QM programs were ‘let off’ because they were deemed to have improved enough so that they no longer needed the support from the government (Ibid.).

The central takeaway here is that neighborhood councils, like the ones mentioned, really do take it upon themselves to use their funds in highly specific ways to improve their neighborhoods. It is the agency that is given to the local people to inspire the changes they see fit themselves that makes QM a win-win; funds are often used with maximum efficiency and effectiveness, and community members are involved and engaged in dialogue with local governments, creating this sense of accountability and ownership that the Socially Integrative City strives to facilitate.

Quartiersmanagement and Urban Renewal through SCB

So, how does the QM system qualify as Urban Renewal through Social Capital Building, and in turn, stand in for the traditional, gentrification-based urban renewal strategy? To answer this question, we must harken back to the goals of QM. The ultimate objective of the program, as described above, is to involve residents in decision-making processes at the neighborhood level, both in order to most effectively allocate resources, but also to “empower” residents and “connect

them to one another” (Ibid.). This element of connectivity is key in drawing the parallel between QM and URSCB: as construction of social capital is grounded in connectivity and interaction within a community, and effective QM is also rooted in people collaborating to produce the best outcomes for their community, then we may consider QM a social capital building tool. QM, therefore, is one example of an alternative to gentrification for urban renewal that cities should refer to as a sustainable model; rather than taking away agency or undermining the democratic process like gentrification does, it gives residents the freedom to choose what happens to the place where they live, and builds connectedness along the way—initiating an ‘upward spiral’ of civic engagement and accountability.

Model 2: SCB Through Smart Architecture

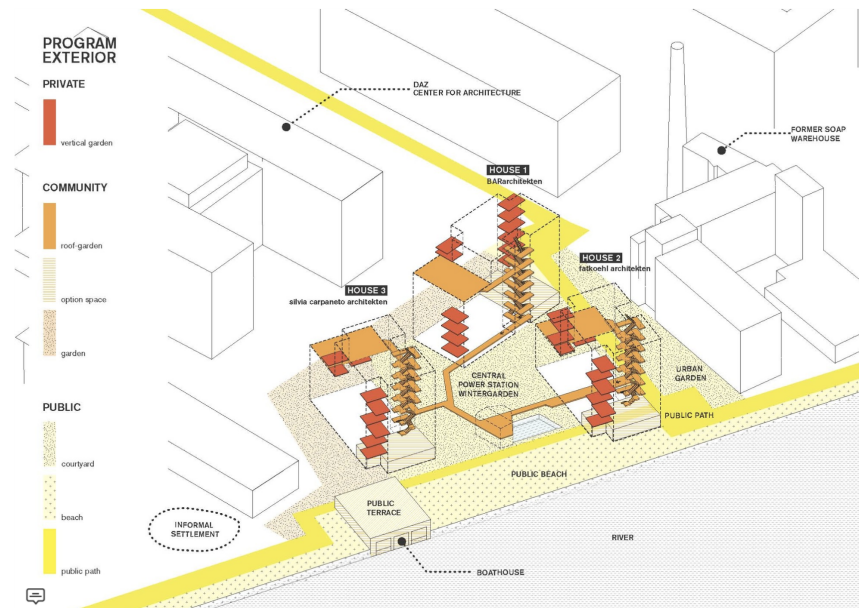
We have demonstrated the propensity of QM to build social capital and, in turn, spur a kind of urban renewal in a neighborhood. It is important to recognize, however, that social capital building innovations can exist and function effectively on even smaller scales than an entire neighborhood. In this section, I explore an example of a Berlin housing co-operative within a larger neighborhood which, not owned by the city, has been uniquely successful in fostering a strong web of connectivity amongst its residents as well as between its residents and the larger community. This project is called *Spreefeld*. *Spreefeld* can and should serve as a model for effective, community-sustaining housing. Neighborhoods looking to spur urban renewal through building social capital should look to it as a ‘blueprint’ of sorts for an innovation on the housing project scale that would help sustain healthy, connected communities and, by consequence, make neighborhoods better places to live and work.

Spreefeld is defined by its architects and the building group that owns it as a “co-housing” model, or an “intentional community” of private homes organized around shared spaces. It is located on the banks of the river Spree at Wilhelmine-Gemberg-Weg 10-14 in the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg district of Berlin. Its mission is to “harness its location’s [central, waterfront] unique potential to create a socially just, economically stable, and environmentally responsible urban building block” (ArchDaily).

In light of the recent history of the area, it makes sense that the cooperative has social justice and the preservation of public space at the core of its mission. *Spreefeld*, among other land-reclamation initiatives, emerged from the *Mediaspree Versenken* [Sink Mediaspree] movement, which was a grassroots reaction to plans for mass-privatization of waterfront space in the Friedrichshain neighborhood in the mid-2000s (Scharenberg et al.). In an effort to prevent a large private development from engulfing the plot and depriving the community of public space it had enjoyed since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the *Spreefeld* Group, a building collective comprised of architects and other private actors spearheaded by Michael LaFond,³ purchased the land. The *Spreefeld* Group now operates the collection of buildings as a not-for-profit cooperative, taking income-adjusted rental and maintenance payments from 140 residents (ArchDaily). *Spreefeld* is also supported and subsidized by several public and private partners who are in support of its mission, including the Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umwelt Berlin, the architecture firms involved in its construction, and others (ArchDaily, Jabłońska, Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Wohnen).

³ Michael LaFond is an American architect living in Berlin. He coined the term “co-housing” and has dedicated his life to researching sustainable housing. He is currently the leader of the Institute for Creative Sustainability in Berlin and is heavily involved in the *Spreefeld* development.

Central to the building block's philosophy is to act as an amenity not just to its residents, but also to the entire neighborhood in which it is situated. The architects designing *Spreefeld* hoped to achieve this through a tactful allocation of public, semi-private and private space, the breakdown of which can be observed in the graphic below:



(Image Source: ArchDaily)

Private Spaces

As can be seen, all residents—who include the likes of doctors and lawyers, but also teachers, health care workers, artists, and small-business and nonprofit managers—enjoy the privacy of their own apartment units. The size of the unit one can rent (each of which is completely unique) is determined based on what a resident is capable of paying; higher income residents can rent larger units, while affordable ‘micro-units’ are leased to lower-income residents at lower prices⁴ (HUD User).

⁴ “To qualify for the rent cap, residents’ annual earnings must not exceed €16,800 (\$18,400) for a single-person household or €25,200 (\$27,060) for a two-person household, with the maximum eligible apartment size being 538

Shared Spaces

Outside the private units, spaces within the upper floors of the building are designed to facilitate as much contact and interaction as possible between residents. Individual floors are organized, for instance, so that all residents must cross through a “common room,” rather than an impersonal hallway, when leaving their apartment. Each building also shares just one single-floor-large kitchen, which includes a massive table where all residents can eat their food. Another example of building-wide shared spaces are the functional roof gardens (food can be grown here on individual plots by anyone living in the building) that sit on two floors in each of the buildings. All residents enjoy the same common spaces and pay an equal, small “use-fee” to maintain community spaces. This makes living in a smaller, affordable unit much more reasonable and comfortable than it might typically be (HUD User, ArchDaily).

Public Spaces

While the majority of the upper floors of the buildings are for private and shared use, the bottom two floors of two-thirds of the buildings are reserved for community use. These floors are designed specifically to invite outsiders to engage with the space. For instance, a daycare open to anyone who wishes to enroll their child occupies one floor, whereas another floor serves as a dance/yoga studio, and another one exists as a co-working space. The last floor is “designed to evolve as needs change;” anyone living in the building or surrounding neighborhood is invited to book the space for a screening, lectures, or other community gathering at their discretion. During

square feet for a single person, 700 square feet for a two-person household, and more for households with more than two people.” (HUD User)

the refugee crisis in 2015, this space was even used to create temporary living arrangements for two families, with the consent of those living in the building (Gelder).

Finally, *Spreefeld* ensures that all of its ground-level outdoor areas, including the waterfront, are completely public. Anyone is welcome to stroll along the banks of the river and enjoy the “public beach” as well as the “food-forest” (vegetable walk) that members of the co-op operate. *Spreefeld* also works with local QM councils to ensure that community members are made aware that spaces within the co-op are available to them (HUD User).

It is important to acknowledge that the *Spreefeld* model is an anomaly. Not every city has the ingrained culture of activism and mobilization that was necessary to organize a movement like *Mediaspree Versenken* and overpower the government’s decision to sell the waterfront land off to developers. More often than not, in fact, when massive development is slated to happen in cities, it is done so under the table and without the consultation of city residents at all. Most cities also do not have an intrinsic understanding of the value of co-housing; since Berlin was a squatter haven not even three decades ago, many Berliners still understand the merits of sharing living spaces and thus are more willing to buy into an experimental housing arrangement like *Spreefeld*.

All of this being said, the success the *Spreefeld* model has had in achieving its goal of helping to foster a connected, better neighborhood and community is notable. This connectedness has helped build social capital in the project itself, and between the project and surrounding community members, spurring urban renewal in the social capital building sense; though the area is not fully gentrified (low-income residents are able to reside at *Spreefeld*, as discussed), it is a safe and desirable place to live as residents and community members were able to claim some form of ownership to its spaces. The existence and success of *Spreefeld* supports the idea that gentrification is not entirely necessary to create better neighborhoods. Like QM, *Spreefeld* can be

classified as a method of urban renewal through social capital building because it strengthens connections within a community. Residents of a place like *Spreefeld* are part of a wider web of people who hold them accountable for their actions. More accountability translates to fewer deviant activities amongst residents, which translates to safer, cleaner, overall better communities.⁵

Conclusion

Thus far we have explored gentrification's transformation from a "natural" phenomenon to an urban renewal strategy under neoliberalism. In face of the reality that gentrification is an inherently undemocratic urban renewal method, we introduced an alternative: Urban Renewal through Social Capital Building. We explored why social capital is important, and connected high levels of social capital to stronger, safer, more accountable and more democratic communities. Following this, we examined two social capital building methods; one policy intervention at the larger, neighborhood scale (QM) and one architectural intervention at the smaller project scale (*Spreefeld*). We looked at both projects' propensities to build social capital in Berlin.

Neoliberalism is so pervasive in the fields of urban planning and metropolitan studies that the common belief is that gentrification is the only way to make cities better. My goal is to demonstrate that it is not the only way. Urban renewal through Social Capital Building is only the

⁵ One counterargument to the idea that gentrification might be preferable to interventions like urban renewal through SCB despite its demonstrated drawbacks might be that urban renewal through SCB requires the expenditure of public funds. But the German economy does not seem to have suffered from any of its "radical" decisions to invest in its cities. With a nominal GDP of \$3.68 trillion, Germany remains the fourth-largest economy in the world (CEIC). The amount of public funds that a program such as *Quartiersmanagement* would require is comparatively infinitesimal; if the United States decided to expend federal funds to run a Neighborhood Management pilot project in fifty cities and kept it going for twenty years, it would cost the equivalent of 0.11% of the country's annual military budget. To reiterate: to shave off 0.11% of the country's military budget for one year could amount to twenty years of sustained ground-up community revival in fifty cities across the United States (Peter G. Peterson Foundation). Needless to say, the barrier to entry for these kinds of experimental innovations in urban renewal in wealthier countries is not cost, but rather a disbelief in the power of systems outside the traditional neoliberal thought framework to function effectively.

beginning of a long list of alternative social capital building tactics that exist in Berlin and around the world, mostly at the grassroots level. It is up to us, as residents of cities, to put pressure on our governments to invest in uncovering what kinds of alternatives will allow our cities to flourish.

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